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ABSTRACT

The Inland Empire (California) Beginning Teacher Support and Assessment Project (IE-BTSA) is intended to develop and implement assessment strategies designed for beginning teachers. The IE-BTSA program includes three major assessments used throughout the beginning teachers' induction year: a classroom observation, a learning journal, and a teacher portfolio. The mentor and the new teacher record their plans on the Professional Growth Plan (PGP), which documents the professional goal, related goal indicators, and specific action plans the new teacher and the mentor will take to reach the goal. Five entries into the portfolio are a minimum requirement for each teacher: the teacher's plan for discipline and management; a letter to parents of students; a lesson plan that has been implemented; a student product used for assessment; and an artifact that is an outcome of a collegial interaction. The portfolio serves as a stimulus for discussion between the new teacher and the mentor, especially after new teacher seminar sessions. The portfolio is a major assessment piece which facilitates teacher reflection and, along with the other IE-BTSA assessments, is the basis for growth plans developed collaboratively by mentor and new teacher. (Contains 16 references.) (JLS)

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# The Use of Portfolios in Beginning Teacher Support and Assessment

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**Objective**

Many states are currently developing policy to implement support and assessment systems for new teachers. This is an attempt to promote teachers' professional development and to increase the percentage of retained teachers. The Inland Empire Beginning Teacher Support and Assessment Project (IE-BTSA) has completed its third year of funded development and implementation of assessment strategies designed to guide support of beginning teachers. This paper briefly describes the IE-BTSA program with focused attention on the portfolio assessment piece.

**Background**

IE-BTSA (Mitchell, D., Scott, L., Sandlin, R., Diaz-Rico, L., Hendrick, I., & Childress, L., 1993) is grounded in a cognitive and developmental model of how beginning teachers move along a continuum from novice toward expert teaching as described within the *Framework of Knowledge, Skills and Abilities for Beginning teachers in California* (Far West Laboratories, 1992) and as proposed by Berliner (1988). Emerging from project data, five teacher roles (Organizer, Instructor, Learner, Mentor, and Colleague) and their 28 component role indicators have been identified as the foundation for cognitive appropriation of concepts of good teaching (Figure A). Beginning teachers' awareness, enactment and confirmation of these roles are iterated during the support and assessment process. In other words, if acquiring teaching expertise is developmental (Katz, 1972; Fuller, 1969; California Department of Education, Commission on Teacher Credentialing, & The California New Teacher Project ,1992), role acquisition can be understood as a series of stages or phases that emerge at different points along the developmental continuum. These three stages of an adult cognitive model are defined as (Mitchell, D. et al., 1993):

1. **Awareness/Comprehension:** Teachers understand what they are trying to do and conceptualize an action because it makes sense. They are unable, however, to translate to practice.

2. **Enactment:** Teachers act on what they are trying to do, and someone who knows what it looks like, an expert teacher, helps the beginning teacher reflect upon and analyze that enactment.
3. **Confirmation:** Teachers analyze and reflect upon the effective parts of the enactment. They can reformulate and predict future outcomes based on the enactment. Their actions are smooth and automatic. Teaching roles become routine.

These three phases are utilized to generate informative feedback for the beginning teacher and to provide a starting point for reflection and professional development. Mentors and the novices separately code as awareness, enactment, or confirmation each of the role indicators as evidenced throughout the various assessments of IE-BTSA.

The IE-BTSA program includes three major assessments which are utilized throughout the first year teachers' induction year: a classroom observation, a learning journal, and a teacher portfolio. The classroom observation engages the mentor in scripting a lesson taught by the new teacher followed by coding links to the related role indicators. The mentor and novice then engage in a discussion of the observed lesson with attention to roles which are being addressed in addition to areas in which they deem some support may be needed.

The learning journal is a strategy which promotes new teachers' problem solving abilities. Implementation of this assessment begins during new teacher seminars within a "learning conversation" in which small groups of new teachers focus on a teaching scenario in which a teacher is struggling. The novice teachers engage in free dialogue related to the scenario, analyzing the situation and making recommendations for change. Following the "conversation", teachers reflect on their own problem strategies related to situations of concern within their role as teacher. Mentors meet with beginning teachers after the seminar and use the written reflection as a stimulus for discussion.

The teacher portfolio is the third major assessment of the IE-BTSA program. New teachers' portfolios consist of teaching artifacts and written reflections. Again, the

written documents serve to stimulate mentor and novice discussion related to implementation of the teaching roles.

All three of the above assessment pieces potentially lead to specific plans for teacher professional development and mentor support. The mentor and new teacher record their plans on the Professional Growth Plan (PGP). This important document serves as a running record of new teacher goals, action plans, and mentor support activities throughout the induction year.

**Educational Importance**

Unlike the most often described professional portfolio designed for exiting a credential program, for seeking employment, or for teacher evaluation; this project's portfolio purpose is to promote the new teacher's reflection and growth within the five teacher roles. This purpose is formative rather than summative as the IE-BTSA portfolio is a collection of evidence which continuously documents growth rather than end-of-project competence. The portfolio development process becomes a means for new teachers, in collaboration with their mentors, to analyze their strengths and prioritize areas of professional focus.

Prior research demonstrates that achieving "expert" levels of teaching involves successful travel along a cognitive path. Teachers learn and grow from the personal analysis and insight they derive from thinking and reflecting on their teaching. The portfolio can engage the teachers in an analysis of their professional role (Shulman, 1988). Thus, teacher portfolios should not only be considered a means of summatively evaluating teacher competence, but should also become a means for formatively assessing and promoting new teachers' professional growth. Additionally, new teachers who utilize the portfolio as a reflective tool for growth may be more likely to continue this beneficial practice throughout their teaching career.

**The IE-BTSA Portfolio Process**

All new teachers within the IE-BTSA program are mentored by a BTSA mentor throughout their first year of teaching. BTSA mentors receive a four day summer training with 5 additional training days scheduled throughout the year to fully prepare them for providing assessment-based support, a role that is new to even experienced mentors.

In addition to frequent contact with their mentor, new teachers attend four day-long seminars which are scheduled throughout the year. These seminars deal with various topics connected to the five roles of teacher. Each of these days includes time for portfolio-based reflection.

Five entries into the portfolio have been defined as a minimum requirement for each teacher. These include:

- the teacher's plan for discipline and management,
- a letter to parents of students,
- a lesson plan which has been implemented,
- a student product used for assessment, and
- an artifact which is an outcome of a colleagial interaction.

These artifacts cross four of the five roles of teacher, which encourages the new teachers to self-analyze in a broader sense than simply reflecting on lesson plans, for example. While most aspects of the instructor role can easily become a focus of the mentor's classroom observation assessment, reflection on the role of colleague is less probable. The IE-BTSA portfolio process facilitates a more comprehensive review. The five artifacts are expected of all IE-BTSA teachers; however, teachers can choose to include additional evidence of growth within their portfolio.

At each of the four beginning teacher seminars, new teachers bring at least one of the assigned artifacts for sharing and reflection. A typical seminar sequence involves the new teachers in learning some new strategies related to topic of the day such as discipline

and management. Following the learning episode, teachers do a read-a-round of their own plans for discipline and management as they share within small groups.

The learning episode and discussion with other new teachers often lead individual teachers to a clearer understanding of their own strengths and needs related to the role of focus. At this point, they spend ten to fifteen minutes of seminar time creating a written reflection which outlines their strengths and possible goals for the future. This reflection is considered a most important component of the IE-BTSA portfolio as it encourages the beginning teachers to identify what the artifact signifies about their own abilities and needs. This written reflection is termed a caption, as it captures the significance of the portfolio entry (Collins, 1992). Additionally, they circle any role indicators they believe are evident within the portfolio entry. Both the portfolio entry and the written caption are placed by the beginning teachers within the portfolio section of their BTSA notebook.

Following the beginning teacher seminar, mentors schedule a conference with their beginning teachers. This meeting is used to debrief about the most recent seminar topic. The new teacher's portfolio serves as a stimulus for this discussion. The mentor and novice review the completed portfolio entry and caption. Mentors are encouraged to also share artifacts of the same nature. This provides the beginning teacher with additional approaches to instruction, parent communication and the other topics addressed within the portfolio.

The awareness (A), enactment (E), and confirmation (C) coding process is also a component of this dialogue session. The mentor and novice take note of any role indicators they believe are represented within the portfolio entry and caption. Each of the identified role indicators are then coded by both participants. This procedure serves to further define for the new teacher, the varied roles of teacher with regard to his/her own behaviors. Additionally, actual coding prompts reflection on progress and/or needs.

When needs are identified, the mentor and new teacher may decide to formalize their plans for addressing the needs by creating an addition to the new teacher's

Professional Growth Plan. This written record documents the professional goal, related role indicators, and specific action plans the new teacher and mentor will take to address the goal. Like the classroom teacher who utilizes student portfolios, the mentor teacher is able to work with the beginning teacher at his or her developmental level due to the portfolio information and the resulting mentor/novice dialogue. Thus, the portfolio is one major assessment piece which facilitates teacher reflection and, along with the other IE-BTSA assessments, is the basis for growth plans developed collaboratively by mentor and new teacher.

**Recommendations**

The IE-BTSA portfolio process has implications for state and local induction programs. The following recommendations might be considered when implementing portfolios to assess and support new teachers.

Promote Development over Time

One characteristic of professional development that has been heavily supported in educational literature is that to obtain maximum benefit, change needs to take place over time. Yet in reality, professional development often violates this premise (Miles, 1995). The one-shot inservice is still the most prevalent practice. The portfolio can be a means for promoting teacher growth over time. To be most effective, the portfolio process must be structured to span the entire year, connect to other support efforts, and promote continual teacher reflection for growth.

Provide Time for Portfolio Reflection within the Professional Day

Fullan (1995) emphasizes the importance of professional development within the culture of work. Professional growth cannot be viewed as isolated from what one does on the job. The portfolio process, then, would be most beneficial if incorporated into the professional day of the beginning teacher. Provision of time for portfolio development and dialogue during professional development days is time well spent. Novice teachers already feel overburdened with the challenges of their new careers. Requiring them to

create portfolios during their personal time may be viewed by them as a hindrance rather than a support to their professional growth.

Promote Professional Dialogue

The portfolio does not reach its maximum potential unless it is the stimulus for professional conversations (Shulman, 1992; Wolf, Whiner, & Hagerty, 1995). Though the gathering and selection of portfolio entries are helpful activities, the true benefit of portfolio development is not realized until teachers discuss the portfolio contents and what they signify. Induction programs might plan to promote portfolio-based conversations among new teachers in addition to mentor/novice dialogs.

Target Individual Teacher Needs

The induction portfolio is a means for addressing individual needs of the beginning teacher. A portfolio used to stimulate novice/mentor reflection and dialogue can be a bridge to individualized goal setting within the Professional Growth Plan. The induction process is thus strengthened by this ability to be flexible and meet the unique needs of teachers as recommended within the literature (Lawson, 1992; Zamparelli, 1992; Wilkinson, 1994). The fix-it model of induction (in which all new teachers are viewed as having the same basic first-year needs) is helpful, but does not adequately address the individual developmental needs of teachers (Gehrke, 1991).

Encourage Comprehensive Reflection on the Teacher Roles

While some induction programs include mentor observation of classroom instruction, the portfolio has the potential to increase the new teacher's ability to reflect upon the full range of teacher roles. Certainly, classroom behaviors are a major part of the teacher's job description, however, many other actions which take place outside of instruction are also critical to a teacher's effectiveness. The portfolio can be the avenue for the novice's consideration of planning, utilization of resources, professional reading, work with colleagues, and other teaching behaviors not evident with a typical classroom observation.

Additionally, the portfolio can more fully capture aspects of actual instruction which, as Shulman (1992) describes, disappear in an instant without a trace. The portfolio makes the teaching experience more tangible and permanent so that there is ample time and opportunity for reflection on practice.

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**FIGURE A**

**IE-BTSA ROLES AND ROLE INDICATORS**

**Organizer**
Developing long range planning.
Organizing classroom procedures/routines/environment.
Grouping to engage students.
Promoting positive climate.
Maintaining effective discipline.

**Instructor**
Setting objectives.
Sequencing instruction.
Involving students' background, interests and prior knowledge.
Using a variety of instructional techniques.
Providing a range of student activities.
Assessing student progress and replanning.
Developing students' critical thinking skills.

**Mentor to Students**
Assessing students' skills.
Providing remediation.
Adjusting instruction to individual needs.
Promoting success for diverse students.
Drawing upon students' culture.
Guiding or coaching for powerful learning.

**Professional Learner**
Expanding content area knowledge.
Acquiring new pedagogical concepts.
Framing and grappling with complex issues.
Learning about school organization and policy.
Learning about diverse student characteristics.

**Colleague**
Collaborating with colleagues to solve problems.
Providing service to school or colleagues.
Drawing on the community to enrich the classroom.
Mobilizing and sharing resources.
Enlisting parental support.